


UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
 Southeast Regional Office
 263 13th Avenue South
 St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505
<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>

F/SER24:SB

Mr. Kevin Anson, Chairman
 Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
 2203 North Lois Avenue, Suite 1100
 Tampa, Florida 33607

MAR 17 2015

Dear ~~Mr. Anson:~~ *Kevin*

Enclosed for review is a request from the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (Mississippi DMR) to obtain an exempted fishing permit (EFP) for a 24-month period. If issued, the EFP would exempt, with certain conditions, for-hire vessels licensed by the State of Mississippi from regulations found at 50 CFR 622.92 (prohibition of possession of red drum in federal waters). The collection of red drum is intended to augment the data available to stock assessment scientists. Data will be collected for studies of population genetics, age and growth, reproduction, and food habits of older individuals found in federal waters.

More details can be found in the enclosed proposal, but in summary, as many as 70 Mississippi-licensed for-hire vessels will be permitted possession of one red drum per person per trip from federal waters with no length restrictions. Many of these vessels also have federal reef fish or coastal migratory pelagic charter vessel/headboat permits. Those that do not have federal permits cannot fish for or possess these species in federal waters. A maximum of 30,000 pounds of red drum (ca. 2,000 fish) will be harvested over the two-year period. Anglers would be allowed to keep their fish upon completion of data collection and removal of tissue/hard parts needed for analyses. Vessel captains would be required to report each trip for dockside intercepts. Adjustments to collections would be made during the program to ensure the self-imposed 30,000-pound "quota" is not exceeded. All data collected within the EFP would be available for state-based and federal stock assessments upon request. The sampling program would occur year round.

The annual retention of 15,000 pounds of red drum is expected to have minimal effects on the red drum stock in the Gulf of Mexico, compared to the annual harvest of 15-20 million pounds in state waters of the five Gulf of Mexico states. The data collection effort would not alter the manner in which current fisheries are conducted; the catch of red drum would be a bycatch of normal fishing activities for other fish species. For this reason, the collections would not further impact habitat or non-target species (including marine mammals or species listed under the Endangered Species Act) over what has been considered in other stock assessments, environmental evaluations, and consultations.

For your review, please also find enclosed a draft EFP, including EFP conditions, for this proposed activity. Please schedule a review of the EFP application by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council at the next meeting. If you need additional information, please contact Steve Branstetter on my staff by calling (727) 824-5305.

Sincerely,

Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.
 Regional Administrator

Enclosure

